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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

EXEMPT NLK-77-1067

12 December 1963

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Cuba - A Status Report

Current US Policy With Respect to Cuba

1. Current US policy is to isolate Cuba from the Western Hemisphere and the rest of the Free World and to exert maximum possible pressures, short of open and direct US military intervention, to prevent the consolidation and stabilization of the Castro-Communist regime. The CIA covert action program is designed to support other governmental measures to proliferate and intensify the pressures on Castro to encourage dissident elements, particularly in the military, to carry out a coup and eliminate Castro and the Soviet presence in Cuba.

2. Our ultimate objective in Cuba is to replace the Castro regime with one which will be fully compatible with the goals of the US and will cooperate with US efforts to establish friendly and stable regimes throughout Latin America.

Prospects for Achieving US Objectives Under Present Policies and Programs

3. Castro's position within Cuba appears to be eroding gradually and recently he has been forced to adopt increasingly harsh measures to maintain his control. The situation in Cuba is characterized by economic stagnation, depressed living conditions, the loss of revolutionary impetus, and the disillusionment of an increasingly large majority of the population. To some extent, this is a result of innate economic deficiencies in Cuba, and more recently, Hurricane Flora; but to a considerable degree the problems confronting the Castro regime have been magnified by Castro's own ineptitude and by the US policy of economic and political isolation, and other harassment and sabotage measures.

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4. We believe that apathy and resentment are now widespread in Cuba. But while apathy and resentment might complicate Castro's problems, they do not represent a serious threat to him or his regime. In short, we believe that Castro, with Bloc and a certain amount of Free World help, is likely to weather his present difficulties. He is also likely to intensify his subversive activities in Latin America, where the fragile political situation increases the potential of his limited subversive capabilities.

5. In sum, our present policy can be characterized as one of low risk and low return: we are unlikely to experience a direct confrontation with the USSR or to engender political strains with allied or neutral nations. On the other hand, we are still far from accomplishing our objectives of toppling the Castro regime and of eliminating Castro's subversive efforts against friendly Latin American regimes. This is not to say that a continuation of our present policy will not result in a further deterioration in Castro's position; it is to say that under our present policy Castro might be able to hang on for several years. During this time, through Castro's example or through his direct efforts, our own efforts in Latin America will be vastly complicated or even neutralized.

Possible Future Courses of Action

6. Since it appears that current US programs at their present levels are not likely, barring unforeseen events such as the sudden death of Castro, to result in the early overthrow of the Castro/Communist regime, it would seem timely to examine what additional covert and overt measures can be taken to quicken the pace of events. The possible future courses of action which follow are less risky than either an invasion or blockade, but would probably involve a substantially higher "noise level" and risk of confrontation with the Soviets than those presently in effect.

A. Covert Actions

7. The current covert action program, if permitted to operate at the pace originally envisioned, will come

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close to making maximum use of CIA's resources and policy authorization. Consideration should be given to expanding and intensifying the category of sabotage and harassment, at least for the next year. The importance of incapacitating the critical power plants and oil refineries in the Havana, Mtanzas, and Santiago areas of Cuba has been generally recognized. However, hazardous operational conditions around these installations, and concern over the political repercussions of the capture of commandos sent on these missions, have inhibited mounting maritime raids. A number of these targets, however, may be more effectively attacked from the air under acceptable risk conditions.

8. Two courses of action together with their advantages and disadvantages are submitted for consideration:

a. Relaxation of the present policy banning all [REDACTED] Cuban exile maritime raids and air strikes against targets in Cuba from US and urge the British to do likewise for Bahaman territory.

1.5(e)(d)
3.4(b)(1)(6)

Advantages

(1) Would increase number of raids having some economic and psychological effect; would dramatically highlight the inability of the regime to cope with these raids and tend to demoralize the armed forces.

(2) In addition to some economic damage, would cause the Cuban government to divert its manpower and other resources from pressing economic problems.

(3) Could embolden a number of "wait and see" Latin American countries to support stronger unilateral and multi-lateral measures against Castro.

(4) [REDACTED]

1.5(e)(d)
3.4(b)(1)(6)

Disadvantages

(1) Would raise "noise level" and increase risk of incidents on high seas in which US Navy might become involved.

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(2) Might cause Soviet reaction in Berlin or elsewhere.

(3) Actions uncontrolled by US both as to timing and selection of targets, possibly striking at Soviet vessels and installations.

(4) US Government would be charged with complicity since American territory being used as base.

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b. Authorization to conduct CIA or autonomous group controlled air strikes against selected major economic targets such as the power plants and oil refineries.

Advantages

(1) Same as for a. above and, in addition, would cause major damage to the Cuban economy.

Disadvantages

(1) Same as for a. above and, in addition, could cause revulsion against Cuban exiles and possibly US if target missed and sizeable number of innocent people killed.

B. Overt Actions by Other US Agencies Supported by CIA as Appropriate

9. The main emphasis of overt US programs against Castro is to complete the economic, political and psychological isolation of Cuba from Latin America and the free world and to build defenses against Castro/Communist subversion in Latin America. These measures have been largely responsible for Castro's current economic distress, but additional effective economic warfare measures could be taken. These are cited below together with their advantages and disadvantages.

a. President Johnson could issue an early policy declaration on Cuba making clear that the US continues to

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regard the Castro regime as intolerable, and that there can be no rapprochement with Castro. Such statements should be designed to stimulate anti-Castro/Communist dissident elements in the armed forces to carry out a coup.

Advantages

(1) Would leave no doubt in minds of dissident Cuban military elements that anti-Castro efforts have the official blessing of the US Government.

(2) Would have a salutary effect on those Latin American leaders who have indicated a willingness to follow a positive US lead in taking more forceful action against Castro.

(3) Statement would have favorable effect on anti-Castro Cuban population and exile community and encourage them to intensify resistance against Castro regime.

Disadvantages

(1) Might be considered to involve the President too directly in operational matters.

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b. By an interplay of diplomatic pressure and political warfare to cause the Kremlin to conclude that Cuba had become a liability and disengagement would be in the best Soviet interest. The President and his representatives could place the Soviets on notice via diplomatic channels and in private confidential discussion that US rapprochement with Castro is excluded from consideration, and that the existence of the Castro regime is a serious impediment to detente with the USSR. The US could offer to assist the Soviets in finding a face-saving way to withdraw gracefully from Cuba without serious long-term damage to its prestige.

Advantages

The advantages of inducing the USSR to disengage from Cuba are obvious.

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Disadvantages

Soviets might attempt to engage the US in protracted diplomatic negotiations with US bargaining concessions in Cuba for US concessions on other critical issues such as Berlin, East-West trade, etc.

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c. There is still considerable opportunity for tightening the economic noose around Castro. More severe US sanctions against countries that trade with or ship to Cuba could be imposed. We are particularly concerned with the current trade and shipping practices of Canada, the UK, Spain and Japan.

Advantages

(1) Forces greater dependence on the Soviet Bloc with consequent increased drain on Soviet resources.

(2) Increased economic chaos leading to greater vulnerability for coup and increased disaffection on part Cuban population.

Disadvantages

(1) Probable adverse public and official reaction from free world and other countries affected by US economic sanctions and pressures.

(2) Practical difficulties in applying sanctions, particularly against friendly countries, might prove embarrassing to the United States.

(3) On a longterm basis, forcing Cuba into closer economic integration with the Soviet Bloc would not be advantageous for the US if other measures do not topple Castro (i.e., creates permanent satellite).

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d. Seek to obtain OAS endorsement for blanket authority under the Rio Treaty to search and seize selected Cuban and OAS member registry vessels at will, to include the use of force if necessary. The ostensible purpose of this measure will be to quarantine covert arms, equipment and personnel shipments from Cuba to Latin America. In fact, however, these actions would be designed to humiliate Castro at home and abroad and to infuriate and provoke him into irresponsible actions which the US, if it so desired, could use as justification for more forceful measures against Cuba.

Advantages

(1) In addition to advantages implied in the text above, it would have favorable psychological effect on Cuban leaders and people, demonstrating firm OAS position against Castro regime.

Disadvantages

(1) Failure effectively to implement OAS decision might discredit OAS, embarrass US and enhance Castro prestige.

(2) Might cause Castro to commit impulsive act such as attack on a Latin American country which could lead to US involvement and possible confrontation with Soviets.

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e. OAS-wide or bilateral agreements with Latin American governments could be negotiated for joint measures, to detect and prevent arms smuggling by land, sea, or air into Latin America. Because of the urgency of the threat, Venezuela and Colombia should be given first priority.

Advantages

(1) Would further isolate Castro and damage his prestige at home.

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(2) Psychological defeat for Castro in Latin America.

(3) Would demoralize and weaken revolutionary elements in Latin America.

Disadvantages

(1) Measure is mainly defensive and does little to hasten removal of Castro.

(2) Might involve risk of Soviet retaliation in Berlin, or elsewhere.

In Conclusion

10. The courses of action suggested above will increase Castro's problems and might thereby hasten his downfall. To the extent that these actions have genuine OAS support and participation, they will be that much more effective. In the last analysis, however, there are only two courses which would eliminate the Castro regime at an early date: an invasion or a complete blockade. Both of these actions would result in a major crisis between the US and the USSR (in Cuba and/or Berlin) and would produce substantial strains in the fabric of US relations with other countries--allied as well as neutral. To a greater extent than in any of the courses discussed above, OAS support would be important, if not critical, in reducing the risks and in increasing the practical and political effect of an invasion or a blockade.

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Add under "Advantages"

(2) If, in fact, a ship were discovered carrying Cuban arms to Latin America, there would be substantial OAS (and possibly general free world support for stronger action against Cuba.)